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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CACEN (JMUDGE), OES (DSINGER, RDALEY)
TASHKENT FOR ESTH (EPUTNAM)
DTRA FOR CTB
CDC FOR SLBOUNT, EMCCRAY

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: RESPONSE TO AVIAN AND PANDEMIC
INFLUENZA RFI

REF: STATE 206992

11. (SBU) Summary: This cable responds to Reftel. The Embassy assesses that the Government of Kazakhstan (GOK) appreciates the severity of the threat of avian and pandemic influenza and is taking rational, concrete steps to address that threat. The GOK is realistic and basically transparent in its actions and public statements. However, the country's preparation for and response to avian and pandemic influenza are somewhat hampered by considerable material needs in the health sector (both human and veterinary) that will not be fixed immediately, and a slow, inefficient bureaucratic process. End summary.

12. (SBU) Answers to the questions in paragraph 4 of Reftel follow:

A) PREPAREDNESS/COMMUNICATION

-- DOES THE GOVERNMENT HAVE A PREPAREDNESS PLAN/STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING AVIAN FLU FROM BECOMING A PANDEMIC AND CONTAINING A PANDEMIC ONCE IT OCCURS? IF THE COUNTRY HAS A STRATEGY, HOW CAPABLE IS IT OF IMPLEMENTING IT? PLEASE PROVIDE A COPY OF THE PLAN OR THE INTERNET ADDRESS FOR THE PLAN.

Answer: The GOK has a basic preparedness plan and is developing a more comprehensive plan in collaboration with CDC and the World Bank, utilizing other national preparedness plans as models, particularly Thailand's. Broadly speaking, Kazakhstan has good prospects for preventing isolated incidents of avian influenza from developing into a human pandemic and to contain a possible pandemic, not least because of the considerable distances separating virtually all human population centers from one another. These distances serve to increase the effectiveness of quarantine measures.

-- HOW TRUTHFUL WILL THE GOVERNMENT BE IN REPORTING THE SCOPE OF ANY DISEASE OUTBREAK AMONG PEOPLE? AMONG ANIMALS? WHAT INCENTIVES COULD BE OFFERED THAT WOULD LIKELY RESULT IN MORE TRANSPARENCY?

Answer: The GOK has been truthful in reporting the scope of human AI disease. There was one suspected human case in Kazakhstan during the August 2005 outbreak. USG personnel from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Naval Medical Research Unit 3 (NAMRU-3) had access to the patient and all diagnostic samples taken from him. Official public reporting of the patient's condition and infection status, which was ultimately negative, was accurate and truthful.

The GOK would likely be truthful in reporting outbreaks on large poultry farms or of mass deaths among migratory birds. However, it is likely that outbreaks on small farms would not be detected by the government and would therefore go unreported.

-- WHERE DOES PREPARING FOR AN AVIAN FLU HUMAN PANDEMIC RANK AMONG GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES? WHO AND WHAT WOULD MOST INFLUENCE THE COUNTRY TO GIVE THE ISSUE A HIGHER PRIORITY? WHO IS THE KEY "GO-TO" PERSON, OFFICE OR DEPARTMENT (I.E., MINISTER FOR HEALTH, PRIME MINISTER, ETC.) FOR USG OFFICIALS TO ENGAGE ON THIS ISSUE?

Answer: The GOK has made avian flu preparedness a priority. A standing interagency commission chaired by the Ministry of Emergency Situations exists, and includes the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Interior, the security services and Customs. The GOK would likely base its sense of urgency in a given situation on what it observes happening in Russia and/or China, although that is not to say that Kazakhstan views either of those countries' surveillance capabilities or preparedness as better than its own. The Ministry of Health (the Minister and the Deputy Minister responsible for the Sanitary and Epidemiology Service) are the "go to" people on this issue, followed by the head of the veterinary service of the Ministry of Agriculture. All of these

individuals are Embassy contacts.

-- HAVE NATIONAL LAWS BEEN REVIEWED TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE

CONSISTENT WITH THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS AND DO NOT POSE BARRIERS TO AVIAN INFLUENZA DETECTION, REPORTING, CONTAINMENT, OR RESPONSE?

Answer: The Embassy is not aware of any prospective changes to legislation that are responsive to the August incidents of avian influenza. However, changing legislation under any circumstances in Kazakhstan is a time-consuming and opaque process. We do not know of any active laws that serve as barriers to avian flu detection, reporting, containment or response. In fact, the GOK was willing to share the strain of H5N1 AI collected in Kazakhstan with very little bureaucratic fanfare, while it has resisted transfer or sharing of strains in other circumstances.

-- IS THE HOST COUNTRY ALREADY WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OR OTHER COUNTRIES ON THE AVIAN FLU ISSUE? ARE GOVERNMENT LEADERS LIKELY TO ASK FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THE US OR OTHER COUNTRIES? WOULD GOVERNMENT LEADERS BE RECEPTIVE TO MESSAGES FROM US LEADERS THROUGH A BILATERAL APPROACH, AT A MULTILATERAL FORUM SUCH AS THE UN (WHO, FAO, ETC.) OR APEC, OR THROUGH BILATERAL CONTACTS BY A THIRD COUNTRY? WHAT WOULD THE COUNTRY WANT FROM THE US IN RETURN FOR ITS EFFORTS?

Answer: The GOK has been open to cooperation with international organizations working on the avian flu issue. WHO and OIE (the international epizootic bureau) have both sent representatives to observe Kazakhstan's response and have contributed advice to the GOK.

-- DOES THE COUNTRY CURRENTLY ADMINISTER ANNUAL FLU SHOTS? IF NOT, MIGHT IT CONSIDER DOING SO? WHAT IS THE PRODUCTION CAPABILITY (I.E., HOW MANY DOSES OF THE ANNUAL TRIVALENT FLU VACCINE CAN THE COUNTRY MAKE) FOR HUMAN INFLUENZA VACCINES IN THE COUNTRY? DOES THE COUNTRY PRODUCE INFLUENZA VACCINE FOR POULTRY AND IF SO HOW MUCH? IF THE COUNTRY IS DEVELOPING AN H5N1 VACCINE, WHERE IS IT IN PRODUCTION AND TESTING? ANY LICENSING ISSUES? IS THERE A LIABILITY SHIELD FOR FOREIGN MAKERS/DONORS OF VACCINES? IF NOT, ANY PROSPECTS OF ONE BEING ENACTED?

Answer: Flu shots are widely available to the public through the private sector. The national government recommended that the oblast governments administer flu shots to high risk individuals, but vaccine was only available for 50% of those deemed to be high risk.

There is currently no vaccine production capability in Kazakhstan.

--HOW WELL INFORMED IS THE POPULATION ABOUT THE AVIAN FLU THREAT AND ABOUT MEASURES THEY SHOULD TAKE TO MITIGATE THE THREAT? WHAT MECHANISMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR PROVIDING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO THE POPULATION, PARTICULARLY IN RURAL AREAS AND HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THESE MEASURES?

Answer: The population is generally well-informed about avian influenza. There is no sense of panic. The GOK went to considerable lengths to get officials out to the poultry-raising regions of the country to educate farmers about the danger of the disease and proper prophylaxis. We consider these measures to be basically effective.

B) SURVEILLANCE/DETECTION

-- HOW CAPABLE ARE THE MEDICAL AND AGRICULTURE SECTORS OF DETECTING A NEW STRAIN OF INFLUENZA AMONG PEOPLE OR ANIMALS RESPECTIVELY? HOW LONG MIGHT IT TAKE FOR CASES TO BE PROPERLY DIAGNOSED, GIVEN OTHER ENDEMIC DISEASES? CAN INFLUENZA VIRUSES BE SUBTYPED IN THE COUNTRY, IF SO BY WHOM, AND IF NOT WHERE ARE THEY SENT? DOES THE COUNTRY SEND SAMPLES TO A WHO/EU/US REFERENCE LABORATORY?

Kazakhstan's medical, veterinary and wildlife sectors are capable of detecting and suspecting disease based upon clinical signs and history. However, the medical sector does not have a well-formed capability to detect a new strain of influenza by laboratory testing. Current diagnostic procedures and equipment can detect cases of influenza, but cannot differentiate particular strains. DTRA is planning to provide the Ministry of Health with equipment

and test reagents to detect avian influenza virus H5N1 by a specific polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test that will provide results within 1 to 2 hours. DTRA will also provide the training that Kazakhstani specialists will need to operate this equipment.

The National Veterinary Center (NVC, located in Astana) of the veterinary service of the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as the Scientific Research Agricultural Institute

(SRAI, located in Otar in southeastern Kazakhstan) of the Ministry of Education and Science both have polymerase chain reaction (PCR) equipment that was provided by DTRA. Reagents and training to detect avian influenza H5N1 virus have been provided by DTRA to both organizations.

The PCR tests specific to H5N1 are not yet approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Agriculture or by Kazakhstani entities for diagnosis of the disease in people or animals. Samples from cases identified by PCR could be sent to NAMRU 3, CDC or USDA for further testing by classical means and to determine the genetic sequence of the influenza virus. However, no standing agreement with the Government of Kazakhstan for transferring specimens to any of these organizations is currently in place. These tests cannot be performed in Kazakhstan at this time.

During the outbreak in August, SRAI provided animal specimens and the Republican Sanitary Epidemiological Service provided human specimens to the NAMRU-3 laboratory in Cairo. CDC collected 175 specimens from individuals in the village where H5N1 was identified (Golubovka village in Pavlodar oblast). These specimens were subsequently sent to CDC in Atlanta through an agreement with the Government of Kazakhstan. The DTRA and CDC offices in Almaty are facilitating collaboration between Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science to perform joint research on human diagnostics at SRAI.

-- WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED IN ORDER TO ENHANCE THE COUNTRY'S DISEASE DETECTION AND OUTBREAK RESPONSE CAPABILITIES? WHAT IS THE COUNTRY'S GREATEST NEED IN THIS AREA FROM THE US OR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS?

Answer: The critical gaps include: strengthening the surveillance systems for both animals and humans; the lack of avian and human vaccines; and medications. In response to the avian influenza situation, DTRA is expediting delivery of a PCR to the Ministry of Health that was ordered under the Threat Agent Detection Response (TADR) program. The Government of Kazakhstan, through the Ministry of Health, has already requested and received assistance from CDC in developing preparedness plans, improving regulatory policies, conducting outbreak investigations, strengthening surveillance activities, and improving human capacity for laboratory diagnosis.

C) RESPONSE/CONTAINMENT

-- DOES THE COUNTRY HAVE A STOCKPILE OF MEDICATIONS, PARTICULARLY OF ANTIVIRALS, AND IF SO HOW MUCH? IF SOME HAS BEEN ORDERED, HOW MUCH AND WHEN IS IT EXPECTED?

Answer: The Government of Kazakhstan allocated money from the 2005 budget to create a stockpile of antivirals. However, the amount is only enough to treat 30,000 cases. While this money has been allocated, the orders for the medications have not yet been placed.

--DOES THE COUNTRY HAVE A STOCKPILE OF PRE-POSITIONED PERSONAL PROTECTIVE GEAR?

Answer: Yes. The government purchased large quantities of personal protective gear as well as disinfectants, during the August outbreak.

--WHAT IS THE RAPID RESPONSE CAPACITY FOR ANIMAL AND HUMAN OUTBREAKS? ARE GUIDELINES IN PLACE FOR THE CULLING AND VACCINATION OF BIRDS, DISINFECTION OF FACILITIES, AND LIMITATIONS ON ANIMAL MOVEMENT?

Answer: Based on the outbreaks in August, the GOK's rapid response capability appears adequate, if yet untested by a truly widespread epidemic.

-- HOW WILLING AND CAPABLE IS THE GOVERNMENT OF IMPOSING QUARANTINES AND SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES (CLOSING SCHOOLS, PUBLIC GATHERINGS, MASS TRANSIT)? WOULD ITS MILITARY ENFORCE QUARANTINES?

Answer: The GOK is definitely capable of imposing quarantines, and the natural geographic sparseness of the country is an added advantage. The GOK imposed effective quarantines in several oblasts (main regional subdivisions) during the August outbreak. The GOK is undoubtedly capable of restricting travel between cities if necessary, as both rail and air transport are fully or partially under state control. The Kazakhstani military would not be likely to participate in quarantine enforcement; however, the paramilitary formations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs would undoubtedly play a role. However, there is no bar to the military participating if the GOK desired.

13. (U) Minimize for Dushanbe considered.

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